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ABSTRACT

Black student attrition and its causes were studied at Indiana University. Approximately 60% of black students do not graduate within 5 years of their initial enrollment, in comparison with 40% of white students. A mail survey identified 48 institutional factors and asked students to respond to each was sent to all African American students who had left the University before graduation in the past 2 years. Responses were received from 20 males and 26 females. Most of the students were Indiana residents, and more than half had lived off campus. Reasons for leaving were diverse, but academic difficulties were the chief reason for withdrawal. Approximately 65% of the respondents left because they were dissatisfied with their grades. Over half felt they had poor study habits, and 42% had been on academic probation. Financial aid difficulties were another major factor contributing to withdrawal. Other factors often cited were the university social environment and the desire to pursue full-time work experience. Thirty-seven percent had transferred to another college, and 38% reported that they would work full-time and attempt to attend college part-time. Implications for retaining black students in college are discussed. A bar graph illustrates the withdrawal reasons. A list of five references is included. (SLD)

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"AN INVESTIGATION OF BLACK STUDENT ATTRITION AT INDIANA UNIVERSITY"

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No reasonable scholar would argue that Black America exists in a state of crisis. African-Americans trail far behind white Americans in establishing parity in the quality of life in the United States. Recently released statistical data depicting the national trends in education, employment, income, housing, crime, and health care for African-Americans are alarming. African Americans trail far behind whites in educational attainment, have higher percentages of unemployment, have significantly lower incomes, reside in inferior housing, receive unsuitable health care and are over represented in American penal institutions (Madhubuti, 1990).

Resolving the social, economic, health and educational issues impacting on African Americans is a complex task requiring intervention on several fronts. However, most individuals, including the Black establishment, agree an important key in narrowing the gap in the quality of life between whites and African Americans in future generations is through higher education. The Commission on Minority Participation in Education and American Life, a subcommittee of the American Council on Education, asserts college degree attainment is crucial in dismantling barriers to full minority participation in American life (A.C.E., 1988).

Consequently, Black student attrition at predominantly white colleges and universities in the United States has increased to alarming percentages and challenges the equity of full societal participation for African Americans. Approximately 82% of African American high school graduates who enroll in college will attend

predominantly white colleges and universities. However, the attrition rate for African American students attending predominantly white schools is approximately 65% (A.C.E., 1989).

Although there are distinct discrepancies in the statistical data regarding student attrition nation wide, the research suggests that from 10-40 percent of all students who enter college will drop out before degree completion. Student attrition at colleges and universities emanate from academic, personal and financial factors. In an analysis of over 100 published studies, the following factors contributed to the attrition of students at colleges and universities (in order of frequency): academic failure, financial difficulties, motivational problems, personal considerations, dissatisfaction with college, military service, and full-time employment (Clewell & Ficklen, 1986).

For minority students, dropping out is a process most often affected by the student's lack of academic and social integration into the institution (Clewell & Ficklen, 1986). It is believed that African American students who are well integrated into the academic and social environments within the University have a better chance of graduating from that institution (Fleming, 1988). College and university programs which focus on and facilitate African American student participation in the school's academic and social environments would facilitate the curtailment of African American student attrition.

Approximately 60% of African American students at Indiana University do not graduate within five years of their initial

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enrollment compared to 40% for white students (I.U. Registrar Report, 1989). The purpose of this study was to determine the reasons why African American students left Indiana University prior to graduation.

Methodology

The Indiana University Registrar's office provided two sets of mailing labels with the local or permanent address of all registered African American students who left Indiana University prior to graduation in the past two years. The instrument, "Withdrawing/Non-returning Student Survey (Short Form)", developed by the American College Testing Service was forwarded to each subject. The questionnaire identified forty-eight institutional factors and requested the subjects to respond to each factor relative to its impact on the student's decision to drop out (primary reason, major reason, minor reason, not a reason). Approximately half the questionnaires were returned non-forwardable. A subsequent mailing was administered two months following the original mailing. Forty-six subjects returned the instrument (Black males = 20; Black Females = 26).

Analysis

The data was forwarded to the American College Testing Service for analysis. The general analytical approach to the data was to develop a linear model integrating the percentages of minority student attrition with the institutional factors identified by the subjects.

Results

The demographic profile of the subjects participating in this study revealed the average age of the subjects was twenty-four years and approximately 85% of the subjects were Indiana residents with 63% of the subjects living off campus during their enrollment at Indiana University. Approximately 70% of the subjects left the University within the first two years of their initial enrollment. At the time of their withdrawal, 95% of the subjects were full-time students with 87% matriculating out of high school and 13% transferring from a two or four year college.

The reasons for leaving Indiana University were diverse. The chief variables impacting on the subjects' decision to withdraw in order of frequency were academic difficulties, insufficient financial aid, undesirable social climate on campus, and the desire to pursue full-time work experience.

The data disclosed academic difficulties were the chief reason the subjects withdrew from Indiana University. Approximately 65% of the respondents reported they left the University because they were dissatisfied with their grades. Almost 61% of the subjects revealed they had inadequate study habits to maintain good grades, 42% reported they were placed on academic probation or were suspended by the University, while 37% felt they received inadequate academic advisement. Approximately 39% of the subjects felt they needed a break from their academic studies while 28% were disappointed by the impersonal attitude of the faculty they encountered.

The male respondents were more likely to experience academic

difficulty when compared to the female subjects. Approximately 50% of the male respondents reported they were placed on academic probation or were suspended compared to 35% for the female respondents.

Financial aid difficulties surfaced as another major contributing factor impacting on the withdrawal of the subjects. Approximately 54% of the subjects reported they could not afford the tuition and fees at Indiana University while 45% reported they received inadequate financial aid from the University. Thirty-five percent reported they did not receive any financial aid from the University, 33% revealed they did not budget their finances properly, while 28% felt the cost of living in Bloomington was too high.

The University environment was also a contributing factor which influenced the withdrawal of the subjects. Approximately 43% reported they left the University because of racial or ethnic tension. Thirty-six percent felt alone or isolated while 35% reported they experienced emotional problems. Approximately 22% of the subjects complained about the lack of a social life while attending Indiana University and 25% of the respondents moved back home to be closer to family and friends.

The data revealed the University's social environment had a greater impact on the female respondents when compared to their male counterparts. Half the female respondents felt isolated and alone compared to 20% for Black males. Forty-six percent of the female respondents reported they experienced emotional problems

while attending the University and felt racial and ethnic tension compared to 25% and 40%, respectively, for their male counterparts.

The final factor which contributed to the subjects' withdrawal from Indiana University was the desire to gain work experience. Twenty-five percent reported they wanted to gain work experience and left the University to pursue full-time employment. Forty percent reported they experienced unexpected expenses while 24% of the respondents who were employed at the time of their withdrawal disclosed they left because of increased pressure to maintain their current employment and attend college.

In the final analysis, thirty-seven percent of the subjects had transferred to another college to continue their academic studies. Approximately 63% of the subjects said they would not re-enroll at Indiana University, 19% reported they would consider re-enrolling and 18% were undecided. Regarding their immediate future plans, 30% of the subjects reported they would continue their current employment, 26% reported they would re-enroll in college while 38% reported they would attempt to work full-time and attend college on a part-time basis.

Discussion

The results of this study were consistent, at least in part, with Clewell and Ficklen's (1986) findings. This investigation was able to disclose academic problems, financial difficulties, unsuitable campus social environment, and pursuing full-time employment, respectively, were the chief reasons African American students withdrew from Indiana University the past two years. The

subjects indicated their dissatisfaction with their grades and that 42% were either on academic probation or suspended. Additionally, they disclosed the need to improve their study habits and the academic counseling they received was inadequate. These findings suggest a number of the students were not prepared to manage their college studies. Two obvious alternatives seem imminent. Indiana University should either recruit African American students with better academic skills indicated by SAT scores, class rank and/or grade point average, or it should make greater efforts to improve the academic skills of the students they currently recruit through information dissemination, remediation courses, mentored or professional counseling and/or academic tutoring.

Another suggestion is to require academically at risk students, identified by high school class rank, standardized test scores, and grade point average, to take basic proficiency exams in math, reading and English composition in their first semester of enrollment. Upon failure of any exam, the student would be required to enroll in a remediation course designed to improve the student's academic skills in that specific area.

An intervention program could be implemented for identified at risk students. Academic progress & evaluation reports on the students could be forwarded to and required from the instructors in whose classes these students are enrolled. If the reports were unfavorable, the student could be contacted and needed tutorial assistance or academic counseling could be initiated.

The second primary factor indicated by the subjects which

contributed to their withdrawal from Indiana University was financial difficulties. More than half the respondents indicated they could not afford the tuition and fees at Indiana University and the financial aid they did receive was inadequate. The data suggests the University should provide more financial aid for African American students if their retention is a legitimate concern. The University should also offer assistance in completing financial aid applications and assist the student in locating other forms of financial assistance outside the University.

The third primary factor indicated by the subjects which influenced their decision to withdraw from Indiana University was the unsuitable campus social environment. Almost half the respondents indicated their concerns regarding racial and ethnic tension and the social isolation they experienced. Additionally, the female respondents felt more serious emotional problems as a result of the University social environment and a greater sense of isolation. This finding suggests the University should consider the importance of the services offered by the University African American program offices (Afro American Affairs, Black Culture Center, Black Student Union, etc.) and provide them with additional support to facilitate the expansion of their program offerings. Programs in the cultural arts, visiting scholars, guest speakers, sporting events, musical entertainment, newsletters, travel opportunities, local social events, student and Greek activities should be more extensive. Additional funding might be a significant factor in assisting these organization in providing

more extensive social and cultural programming for African American students attending Indiana University. This strategy could curtail the social isolation experienced by African American students.

The fourth variable which influenced the subjects' withdrawal from school was the desire to gain work experience and pursue full-time employment. It is possible the desire to pursue full-time employment was spurred by the problems associated with their academic, financial aid and social experiences at Indiana University. If those problems were remedied, the students may have continued their studies at Indiana University. A follow up study would have to be implemented to determine if this relationship exists.

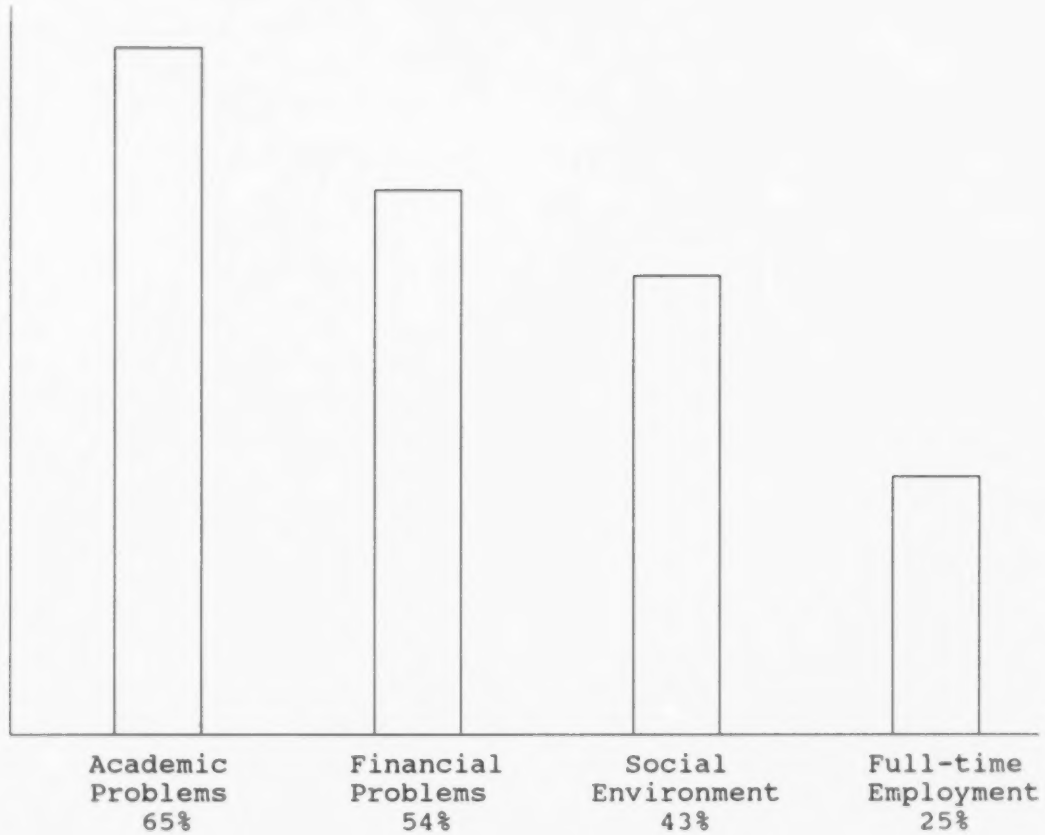
Conclusions

The data provided by this investigation are disturbing. Gains in the enrollment of minority students at Indiana University are overshadowed by their high attrition rates. Further, this condition surely contributes to the growing discrepancies in degree attainment between minority and white students. The results represent the inadequacy of current retention efforts and highlight the need for stronger more diverse programming in that area.

The needs of African American students are different from the majority (white) student and the University should recognize that fact. If the special needs of minority students go unheeded, high attrition, as indicated by this investigation, are sure to remain. Indiana University could and should make greater efforts to address the concerns of its African American students if it intends to

extol the virtues of its mission statement, that of educating and preparing its students to become productive American citizens. If even one student fails to attain his or her academic goals because of inadequate services provided by Indiana University, then this institution has failed in accomplishing its obligation to the diverse society in which we live.

TABLE I
REASONS WHY AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS
WITHDREW FROM INDIANA UNIVERSITY



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